

A Nexus wedding



Viola Grace

We join Abby and Xander on their big day, a huge wedding at Hotel Spectre. When the rings go missing, the bridal gown gets tainted with blood and the groom starts a fistfight in the garden, only the efforts of friends and creatures can make Abby have the wedding day she deserves.

Whatever fate had in mind, this will be the happiest damned bride that ever animated her lawn ornaments. Or else.

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A Nexus Wedding

By

Viola Grace

Dedication

*To Tina, Jay and Janet who wedged me through
this book. It's short, but here because of them.*

Chapter One

Hotel Spectre gleamed in the early morning light. The tents placed in the garden began to fill to capacity as everyone arrived for the Nexus's wedding.

Abby peeked out between the drifting panels of silk and fidgeted. She couldn't see Xander, but she could feel that he was over on the other side of the garden and just as anxious as she was.

In an effort to make sure that the rings had remained safe, Xander had given them to her most trusted gnome, Bitsy.

Bitsy had fallen asleep and his daughter had taken off with the rings, proudly hiding them where no one had been able to find them. The gnome-goyle was currently wailing in frustration because she would not be allowed to attend the wedding unless she got the rings back. The hardest part of it was that with the Hotel's morphing architecture, Alphie wasn't sure where the rings were anymore.

"Nexus, we need you back here for hair and

nails. They will find the rings, I am sure of it." Mistress Galfor was more rattled than she was trying to let on. Her four hands were tightly clutched together as she darted nervous glances toward the dress rack.

"Is something else wrong?"

"No, no, of course not. Relax. This is your special day." Galfor shoved her into the chair in front of the mirror that was set aside for the bride's use.

A vampire hairdresser started on her locks and an elf knelt at her feet, taking her hands into her custody.

Abby was trapped and these women had determined looks that told her she wasn't going anywhere until they were done.

* * * *

Mistress Galfor darted out of the bridal tent and found Raven Dexter.

The midwife looked at her with curiosity, her blue leather corset with black silk skirt making her look like an exotic blooming flower. "What is it?"

"The gown is stained. We need someone to remove it."

"The gown? Oh my god, the bridal gown?" Raven's red eyes were wide with shock.

"Yes. There was a problem with transport and a

splinter gouged into the hand of one of the carriers. A troll."

Raven winced. "Troll blood is the worst-possible stain. Of course, it would have to be something like that. Give me a moment."

Raven turned around and scanned the growing crowd. "I think I may be able to find someone to help. How much time do I have?"

"An hour. The bridesmaids are helping me delay, but I don't know how long it will take to do Abby's nails and hair."

She was almost crying. Her tears welled but didn't fall. This was a disaster. "I would put on a new panel, but I don't have enough of the spider silk. We have to clean that gown."

Galfor accepted the hug that the midwife gave her.

"Give me ten minutes. I will find something." There was something so calm about those red eyes under the white arched brows.

With a shaking nod, she returned to the bridal tent. While across the garden another outburst of activity was occurring, she didn't even look. Her mind was locked on the gown and the stain that would mark it forever if something couldn't be done before the ceremony.

In a move of desperation, she grabbed her phone and called the assistant who was still at the shop. "Bring every unbleached silk gown we have.

Every single one. I want them here when you bring the last of the gowns for the bridesmaids and flower girls. Use a portal. I don't want you to waste any time."

"Mistress, are you sure? That is close to twenty gowns."

"Bring them all. This is an emergency." She snapped the phone closed and tucked it into her clothing so she could feel the vibration if it went off. It was time to pretend everything was normal. Abby was an amazing client, but it was her wedding day and everything had to go according to plan. The Nexus's wedding had to go off without any problems.

* * * *

Verne stopped Strykr outside the groom's tent. "Is everything going according to plan?"

Xander's great-to-the-nth-degree grandfather scowled. "Not really. The singer hasn't arrived and the musicians keep breaking into fistfights. Too many races are represented and they are furious that no one is being given priority."

Verne closed his eyes and winced at the replay from his own wedding months earlier. "Hellebore isn't here?"

"No. I have heard that her family wasn't provided with transportation. We are arranging an

emergency transport, but a gateway that big has to be created offsite."

"Did you call her?"

Strykr blinked. "No. I didn't think of that. I have been depending on communication from her family."

"Don't. They are not fans of half-breeds." He flipped open his phone and dialled the singer. "Hellebore, this is Verne."

"Hey, Verne. This is a little bit of a flashback, isn't it? Seems the matriarch forgot to include us in the transport." The hypnotic tone of the singer came through, even on the phone.

"Are you ready?"

"Yup."

He pressed the phone against his chest. "Strykr, can you open a portal at the far end of the garden?"

"Certainly, I am on my way. Where am I opening it?" He took two strides and stopped, waiting for instructions.

"Hellebore, do you have a beacon?"

"Yup. Abby gave me one in case something like this happened. It's shaped like a gnome first place medal."

Verne started to laugh. "Hellebore, focus on the Hotel and squeeze the medal. It's a transport key."

"You aren't serious?"

"I am. She made them for the gnomes and they work fairly well at bringing them home again."

Laughter cascaded through the phone line. "I will see you in a few minutes."

Verne hung up and smiled at Strykr, "Crisis averted."

The old elf smiled and took a deep sigh in relief. "I will go and offer my grandson a few words of advice on living with a Nexus."

"Go ahead, he could use all the advice he can get."

Strykr opened the tent flap and disappeared inside while the roar of a motorcycle engine at the edge of the property announced Hellebore's arrival.

That was one thing off his list. Now, where was the caterer?

Chapter Two

“It’s not in here. How could you think it was in here?” Bitsy was hissing at Echo and the dragon took offence.

“I tasted Xander and Abby in here. How could I know that they used this room to sneak aside and frolic?” The dragon shook her spotted head and scowled. “They seem to have copulated in ten percent of the building.”

They were on the floor with the ballrooms and the wide expanse of dance floor stretched before them. “I am sorry. If Alphaica hadn’t taken off with the rings, I wouldn’t have endangered the wedding.”

“True, but she is a handful.”

“Buffy and I both need to watch her when she flies.”

Echo inclined her head and she picked Bitsy up by his shoulders, taking flight. “There are other places to search. I sense something in the basement that seems a likely candidate.”

Bitsy would have shrugged, but pinned as he was, he simply agreed. "Let's get moving. Time is running out."

* * * *

"Where did the caterer go?" Laura and Seesee were in the centre of the hotel kitchen watching the staff milling around, trying to come up with the morning buffet for all of the species.

"He had a nervous breakdown. The idea of cooking for the Nexus as well as all of the dignitaries was too much for him." Salleth the lamia let her scales rub against each other.

Seesee assessed what still needed to be done and made an executive decision. "Call in all of the food vendors from the Magic Summit. Abby likes their food and she doesn't really care about what she eats as long as it doesn't kill her."

Salleth blinked. "Okay. If you are sure..."

Laura nodded. "Wonderful idea. Bring them in as fast as you can. The council will bear the price of the transports."

The snake's scales writhed. "You want them all transported?"

"We do. Time is of the essence here." Seesee smiled grimly as she helped take some small items out of the oven. "Get a mind healer in here in the meantime to work on the caterer. He shouldn't

have taken the contract if he couldn't do the job."

"Will do." Salleth was on the phone and talking to food vendors in seconds, promising them full recompense for all of their products and services if they could get their butts into a portal.

Laura sighed in relief. "That was a close one."

Seesee smiled and her prehensile hair writhed with tension. "We aren't out of the woods yet. Let's head to the tent for hair and nails. Abby will be getting twitchy by now."

* * * *

Raven found the person she had been looking for over by the snack buffet. "Gregack. Is Caleg around?"

"Midwife." He nodded and jerked his head toward a gathering of mothers with children. "Caleg is enjoying the party, thank you for the invitation."

"Not a problem, Abby has always been very accommodating, she understood the politics involved." Raven patted the goblin on the shoulder and went to speak with his troll bride.

Caleg's face lit up shyly as Raven approached. The two-year-old in her arms smiled and waved at Raven. "Hello, Cisthigin. That is a pretty, pretty dress."

The small goblin-troll half-breed giggled and

shrugged her shoulders.

She hugged the troll lightly and whispered in her ear. "Caleg, I need a boon."

"Whatever you need, midwife."

"How do you get troll blood out of silk?" Her whisper was as quiet as she could make it and still be heard.

Caleg smiled. "Another troll has to suck it out. A simple procedure. Why? Did you get blood on your gown?"

Raven flicked a look toward the bridal tent. "Not *my* gown."

"Oh. Oh. Let me just drop Cissy off with Gregack and I will come with you."

"You can bring her along. Gaia is there and it would be nice for her to have someone her own size to play with." Raven and her first troll client walked together to the bridal tent.

Gaia was with the gnomes in the front chamber and she looked with fascination at a person who was just her size, though of a different species.

The two girls in their pretty dresses squealed and started chasing the gnomes around on wobbly legs.

"Galfor? Could you come here?" Raven stood and called cheerfully to the seamstress.

The stressed goblin came out and looked at Raven with relief. "You found something?"

"Someone. Galfor, this is Caleg. Caleg is willing

to suck the blood out of the gown." Raven smiled and watched the women shake hands. "I will watch the younglings."

Raven settled to catch the little girls if they got too close to a gnome and in less than twenty minutes, Caleg was out, wiping her lips. "It's done. Clean as a whistle. She is just rinsing and drying the affected area now. A lovely gown though. I can see why she wanted to save it."

Raven hugged the troll and smiled at Cissy as she and Gaia worked to corner Mitsy. "I owe you one."

"You owe me nothing. If it wasn't for you, I would have been dead in labour." Caleg gave her a hug that almost cracked her bones. "Why aren't you in the bridal party?"

"I am...sort of. In my position, I have to run at a moment's notice. I won't risk ruining a wedding." She grinned and ran a hand down her leather corset. "Plus, this is much more my style. I will man the guestbook later."

"I would have to agree. Your job does kick in at awkward times." She grabbed her daughter before the girl could make a lunge for the gnome. Cissy kicked and wailed, but a stern tap on her nose and she quieted.

Gaia looked disappointed to lose her hunting companion. She sat down and grabbed a handful of crayons, scribbling away in her colouring book,

leaving Mitsy to catch her breath.

Caleg waved as she left, "Best wishes to the Nexus."

"I will pass them along." Raven smiled and waved back to Cissy who wriggled both hands over her mommy's shoulder.

Pulling a lock of hair over one shoulder, Raven casually worked her way deeper into the bridal tent. "Hello, Abby. You look amazing."

Out of the corner of her eye, Raven noticed a relieved Galfor casually steaming a white gown of beautiful construction. An assistant with a pile of bags was looking pleased but exhausted. That must have been Plan B.

"Raven, you look amazing. No calls yet?"

"Not yet. I am hoping to make it through the vows." She smiled and winked at Abby's reflection.

"Do you think you and Eylene will ever make it down the aisle?"

"Only if I am delivering a baby in Vegas and we can get a fifteen-minute ceremony in." She chuckled. "Nah, his mother is too freaked by the thought of a magic-less woman in the family."

"Too bad. You two are cute together. You could be enjoying all this." Abby nodded her head to the vampire working on her hair and the elf on her nails.

"Looks like fun, but I have to stay loose in case I

am needed. It's a burden, but there it is." She chuckled. "I am going to go out pixie counting. There looks to be a flock coming in from the west."

"Good. I was hoping that they would be able to make it. They are interrupting a migration for this."

Raven laughed. "You set them up to migrate?"

"I had to. It was an act of desperation." They shared a laugh and got glares from her aestheticians.

"I will see you later. You are looking lovely. Every inch a bride."

Abby's shy smile gave Raven a boost as she exited the tent. She exhaled heavily and grinned with triumph. "One disaster averted."

Chapter Three

The pixies swirled above the garden and Bitsy gestured to them. "They can find them. They outnumber us by hundreds."

"Excellent idea. You grab one and try to explain the problem." Echo's snarl indicated the flaw in his plan.

"There is the special one. She will find them." Bitsy was confident. He had to be. He didn't want to tell the Nexus that he had lost her rings and no one could find them.

"Right. I will fly through them, you try and snag her."

"She is the one cracking with the Nexus energy. You should be able to spot her." Bitsy didn't like the dragon's attitude. It wasn't Echo's fault that the rings were missing. The Nexus was depending on them. She should be more helpful.

"Fine. I will drop you here." Echo put him on the ground and her wings flared and flashed as she darted into the cloud of pixies.

* * * *

Stupid gnome. Everyone knew that Alphaica had a raven's eye when it came to shiny things. Echo swooped through the cloud of pixies looking for the one who used to be a homicidal dryad. All of the pixies in the cloud got out of her way and it was like hunting in a school of fish. They darted away, their high-pitched squeals and giggles irritating the heck out of her.

Aha. There she was. Autone was fluttering in a casual manner and instead of snagging her, Echo decided to ask politely. "Autone, will you please ask your people to assist us in finding the Nexus's wedding rings? They are somewhere in the hotel and Alphie can't remember where she put them."

Autone fluttered with indecision before she nodded her tiny head. She chirped orders to her folk and in seconds, the air around Echo was clear of tiny creatures.

Echo flew back to Bitsy and landed next to him. "I think that may have been a tactical error."

"Why do you say that?" Bitsy seemed relieved that the pixies were looking for the rings. They could cover a lot more square footage than the gnomes could.

"Because they didn't ask me what the rings looked like. This is going to get ugly."

* * * *

Seesee popped her head into the hotel kitchen and smiled. A variety of snack foods was under construction and several trays were starting to circulate among the waiting guests.

A pixie flitted into the kitchen, did a full circle and fluttered further into the hotel. Seesee didn't know what it was up to, but she had never before seen one of Abby's creatures exhibit that kind of focus.

"Is everyone clear on their duties today?" She raised her voice to be heard amongst the clanging and clatter of a fully staffed kitchen. They were simply fortunate that there was no set food selection. Abby and Xander had a firm grasp of the varied diets of the races invited. It was an anything-goes buffet as long as you didn't eat anything you couldn't identify.

"Yes, ma'am." The crew saluted. One of the merfolk stepped forward. "Might I add, it is an honour to chip in on such an auspicious occasion."

"We thank you for helping us make the Nexus's big day special and as far as she is concerned, nothing is going on." The laughter that rippled through the kitchen warmed her and she nodded. "Salleth will wrangle anything you need."

She sighed. It was time to get ready for the

ceremony. Laura was speaking to the official who was going to preside over the nuptials and everything seemed to be going well.

* * * *

“Can you delay any more?” Laura was keeping a cheerful expression on her face, but inside she was tense. The rings were still nowhere to be seen.

Rakonell scowled, her mouth pulled into a frown “No. We must have the ceremony at noon and the next at sunset.”

“Isn’t there anything you can do?”

“I am afraid not. They will be married at that time even if neither of them is here to say their vows. The blood they have given already on the contract is sufficient.”

Laura groaned. “Fine. Thank you for considering it. We will be ready to go.” The woman hadn’t considered anything but manners mattered.

Laura entered the bridal tent and looked to Buffy. She shook her head slowly and rocked the little menace that started this whole drama.

“Alphie, hello there.” Laura made her voice as soft as she could.

The little gnome with wings looked up from her position in her mother’s arms. “Lala?”

“Yes, sweetie. It’s Lala.” That the creature could

Speak clearly at all was a miracle. Seesee and Lala were honoured aunts. "Do you remember the shinies that your daddy had?"

The little one sucked her lower lip and nodded.

"Do you remember where you put them?"

The small head shook the negative. "It was a big room with brown and smelled like Nana Abby."

That didn't narrow it down. Between the shower, the giving of the trousseau and the bachelorette party, Abby had been over the entire hotel in the last week.

Hopefully, the gnomes would have better luck. Laura had to get dressed for the ceremony.

* * * *

Abby's hair and nails were done, her makeup was flawless and now it was time to step into her dress.

Mistress Galfor brought the gown out with tremendous ceremony.

"Oh, it's gorgeous."

The relief that flickered through the goblin's eyes gave her an inkling that something had happened she was unaware of.

Her undergarments were put on in the middle of the room, fitted, tucked and snapped until she was laced into a tight corset that would let the gown fit perfectly. Her legs were encased in silk stockings and the panties were more of a

suggestion than a fact.

As Galfor held the gown out for her to step into, Seesee and Laura moved to help her balance. It was a harrowing moment, but she was in her wedding gown, primped and prepped in ten minutes.

Abby sighed. "Was there any luck with the rings?"

Laura opened her mouth to answer when a cloud of pixies came in and showered them with gold, silver, platinum and steel rings. In less than thirty seconds, two hundred rings.

"Oh my. It looks like they found the rings." Abby giggled, a hand to her lips. "How pissed do you think the guests are right now?"

Chapter Four

Outrage was almost palpable. It got Xander's attention as he tried to calm his nerves. He could hear noises outside the tent and they were not good noises.

Verne tried to stop him from leaving. "You don't want to go out there. It looks like there is a riot starting up."

"A riot? What the hell?" Xander left the groom's tent with his grandfather behind him.

Raven the midwife, her handler, Eyleneo, with Max the vampire abomination were dealing with a large group of irate beings, trying to keep them from heading to the bridal tent.

"What is going on out here?" He raised his voice so it would carry.

"Those creatures of hers stole our jewellery." One of the dwarf lords was shaking his fist.

"I beg your pardon?" Xander was surprised. Abby had gotten all of her creatures to be on their best behaviour.

One of his aunts came forward and explained. "The pixies came, stunned us and took our rings, then flew off to the bridal tent."

Xander turned and started toward the bridal tent when Max stopped him. "Where do you think you are going?"

"I am going to find out why the pixies stole all the rings on the guests."

"You are not going to see Abby before the ceremony. It's bad luck." She crossed her arms over her ample bosom and glared at him, eye to eye.

"You have five minutes to get to the bottom of this and tell me what is going on." He crossed his arms and glared back.

Max blurred and ran to the bridal tent, an impressive feat in her gown and heels. She disappeared into the floating white silk and Xander was left to face the crowd.

"I am sure that it is nothing." He shrugged, feeling useless.

"That isn't nothing. That is an heirloom." The dwarf was irate.

"It will be returned to you."

"After she has stolen the magic from it?"

Xander had enough. The frustration of being a groom with nothing to do and this man who was intimating that Abby was up to no good with the rings was too much for him. With a roar, he

charged the dwarf and they tumbled to the ground, fists flailing.

The solid feel of flesh beneath his fists gave him satisfaction, as did the occasional blow that the massively strong dwarf managed to land.

They fought together until hands pulled them apart. Xander could feel blood trickling down his face and he cursed his impulse to fight. This was not the handsome groom that he had wanted to give Abby.

Dammit.

* * * *

Max swirled into the bridal tent and eyed the collection of rings at Abby's feet. They were being presented to her and when she cried out in delight, Max got her clue.

"You lost the rings."

Abby looked up from the bands in her hand and smiled. "We found them."

The relief in the faces of the two bridesmaids and the seamstress was palpable. "Wonderful. Now, can you tell your hovering entourage to return the other rings to their rightful owners?"

Abby laughed. "My dearest fliers. Could you please return the rings to the people you took them from?"

The pixies chattered together, then moved as

one, picking up rings and darting out the tent flap. A tiny female with pink hair hovered in front of Max and gave her the sapphire ring that Gregori had presented her with. "Thank you, little one."

It chirped at her and giggled as it flew out to be with its brethren.

Abby blushed. "They got yours, too?"

"I didn't even notice. Abby, you are stunning."

She smiled and touched her dress. "Thank you. I feel pretty."

Max laughed. "You are. Now, I will inform Xander of what is going on before there is a riot. See you at the ceremony."

"Thanks, Max." Abby waved as she left.

Shaking her head and moving as quickly as she dared, Max arrived just in time to see a fistfight break out between the obnoxious dwarf and the groom.

A frustrated pixie hovered nearby with the dwarf's ring. Max held out her hand and the creature landed. "Let the boys have their moment."

Raven was nearby, so Max wandered over. "Hello again, Raven. Nice day."

Raven's lips twitched. "Tell me about it. Yes, lovely weather. That is a fabulous dress."

"Thank you. Galfor strikes again." The fitted silk gown hugged every ample curve of her tall frame, highlighting her hips and the narrowness of

her waist. The vee of the neckline dipped low, but the built-in structure kept her breasts where they were supposed to be.

"Raven, do you know of any healers nearby, like, in this crowd maybe?"

The pixies were returning the rings and several people were blushing. Apparently, their thoughts were of an unkind nature and having the rings back embarrassed them.

"Sure. The goblin, to the left. Kaskal. He is excellent, why?"

"Oh, I am pretty sure that we don't want a scuffed groom at the altar and it is almost noon."

Raven caught on. "If the ladies are dressed, I will fetch Galfor to do damage control on Xander."

Max gave her a thumbs-up and stepped forward with the pixie in hand. "Oy, Lord Mortiven. Here is your damned ring."

The pixie hovered in front of the dwarf and he picked up the ring with swollen fingers.

Xander was looking sheepish as he wiped blood from his golden skin.

Max crossed to Kaskal and asked, "Are you a healer?"

"I am." He was grinning.

"Will you?" She gestured to Xander.

"I will." Kaskal strode to Xander and the elf shouted as he was healed. Apparently, Kaskal used the burn healing that was fast but painful. It

served the elf right.

Max's mouth watered slightly at the blood, but she eyed Xander's face. It was good. "Groomsman! Get him prepped. Noon is almost upon us."

Verne nodded and grabbed Xander by the arm, hauling him bodily back to the groom's tent.

Rakonell was in her robes and clapped her hands. "People, please get to your seats. We will begin in a few minutes." She looked up to the sun. "Five minutes."

* * * *

Xander cursed as he looked down at his torn and stained formal tunic. The rich blue was shredded in a few spots and his boots were scuffed. "I really should have held my temper."

"There is a reason that the wolves have fights and games at weddings. It lets us blow off steam. Now get your boots off."

Mistress Galfor charged into the tent and ordered, "Strip. I have a spare tunic for you, but if you blow this one, you are on your own."

His lips twitched as he removed his clothing. "Someone warned you?"

"Yes. Now get out of that tunic, brush your trousers and fix your hair. You need to be at the altar, now." The goblin unzipped a bag and withdrew a copy of his tunic, down to the

embroidery.

Xander took a look at his wild hair and quickly tidied it. He also scrubbed off a few smudges on his face and washed his hands. When he was ready, he turned to Galfor and she helped him into his tunic.

He belted it with a wide sash that the seamstress jerked and tucked until it was perfect.

“Boots?”

Verne presented the footwear with a flourish and a glossy finish. He knelt and helped Xander into his boots, then stood and let Galfor finish his sash as well.

Miklos emerged from the back, straightening his sash and putting on sunglasses. “It’s time.”

Xander looked at the vampire in surprise. “Have you been back there the whole time?”

“Pretty much. I came in at dawn and was reading a book. What did I miss?”

Laughing, Verne clapped him on the shoulder and they sobered their expressions for the procession.

Xander turned to Galfor before she could leave. “Thank you, Mistress Galfor. Your efforts on Abby’s and my behalf have been truly beyond the call of duty. Our sincerest thanks.”

She smiled. “It has been an honour to serve.” A tear formed in her eye as she nodded and left the tent as quickly as she had come.

Miklos went to the tent flap and nodded. A low drumming began and Xander straightened. It was time to make Abby his.

Chapter Five

Abby took a deep breath and listened to the drumming. When the drumming stopped, her bridesmaids would proceed, then her creatures and then she would make her way down the path to Xander.

Flowers would not be carried in the procession. Magic was going to be carried instead.

Abby charged the large glass balls quickly. She had enough joyous energy inside her to power a small city and it was a relief to get rid of some of it.

Small beads were ready for the pixies and super balls for the gnomes, gargoyles and the small elves. Everyone was carrying magic, her dowry to Xander's family. It was an old tradition, but she had the magic, so sharing it with the Desmiths was fine with her.

The drums ceased, Laura and Seesee picked up their orbs and started to walk. Gaia was being carried by her mother and Abby wished she could see the little one waving at people as she passed

them.

As the bridesmaids left the tent, Hellebore began to sing a hypnotic, lilting tune. The gnomes and elves went next.

May I sit on your shoulder?

Abby smiled at her dragon. *Yes, you may. He is promising to be true to all of us after all.*

The dragon landed on her shoulder and preened.

Laughing, Abby watched the gargoyles take their balls and flit out toward their audience and then the pixies lit the interior of the tent with their beads of magic.

She pressed a hand to her chest and smiled when she felt the rings, right where they were supposed to be, next to her heart with a magical charge that could make the world tremble.

With the pixies lighting the way, she walked out into the noonday sun, a crowd of magical creatures watching her with rapt attention.

Hellebore's voice soared as Abby emerged with a cloud of pixies surrounding her. She felt pretty, magical and most of all, like a bride.

Between her hands, she pulled a ball of magic and held it as she paced slowly toward the altar where Xander was waiting. She smiled at him, a smile that held all of her joy at being here with him and sharing this time and their love with those they held dear.

He looked vaguely stunned but very happy. Tears gleamed in his eyes as she approached. She held the magic in her left hand and took his right hand with her own.

Rakonell beamed at them both. "Welcome, one and all, to this union of Annabeth Hanover and Alexander Desmith.

"To say that these two were destined for each other would be an understatement to any who have seen their love grow in the strangest of circumstances."

The crowd laughed.

"But beneath the bizarre bonding, the strange friends and the unusual events that haunted their first moments together came a deep and abiding love and trust that we are here together today to celebrate.

Rakonell opened a large empty box. "Annabeth, do you have your dowry?"

She smiled at Rakonell and gestured to her maids and creatures. "I hereby give this magic to the Desmith family as I prepare to join them."

The orbs piled into the box followed by the ball of concentrated magic. The box was closed and Reginald Desmith came forward.

"We accept this dowry and welcome Abby into our family." He bowed and retreated.

Xander grinned and took both of her hands in his own.

Rakonell smiled. "Xander, do you have the rings?"

He looked to Bitsy, who looked to the pixies who looked to Abby. She delved into her bodice and withdrew the rings. "Yes, he does."

She slipped them into his hands as a wave of laughter ran through the crowd. Some of them picked up on why the pixies had stolen their rings, that much was certain.

"Alexander Desmith, do you take this Nexus to be your lifelong companion and agree to protect her against all threats that may come upon your household? Do you agree to assist in the wellbeing and discipline of the creatures and magic she brings into the world?"

"I do." Xander's eyes smiled and he slipped the ring onto Abby's ring finger.

"Annabeth Hanover, do you agree to take this elf to be your lifelong companion and welcome his assistance in fighting all threats that may come upon your household, as well as to accept his counsel in dealing with realms and people of magic?"

She fought happy laughter. "I do." Xander pressed his ring into her hand and she slipped it onto his ring finger.

"Abby and Xander now have their own questions and vows." Rakonell folded her hands.

Abby smiled. "Xander, do you accept my

creatures now and future as joint responsibility between us both? Will you counsel them, love them and encourage them as they begin to walk in the world?"

He nodded, "I do. Abby, will you promise to share your plots and schemes with me so that I can be of the most use to you in times of strain?"

She blushed, "I do."

Rakonell looked at them and then raised her hands together with an acorn held between her palms. "This oak will one day grow a dryad. The tree that will grow will prove your love and the lives that you lead. It will show future generations how a Nexus and his or her true love can live and thrive. All triumphs, arguments and failures will be recorded within the rings of the tree."

Another dryad to one side brought forth a pot and the acorn was planted in the pot. "Place your hands on the pot."

As one, they pressed their hands to the soil. Abby felt a tingling under her palm and the look in Xander's eyes said he felt the same.

"The seed is now tuned to you and I welcome all to enjoy a moment of silent celebration."

Abby and Xander grinned into each other's eyes in silent celebration. He leaned down and kissed her, starting a round of applause that wrecked Rakonell's silence.

Abby wrapped both of her arms around

Xander's neck and surrendered to his kiss, memorizing his taste in that one moment and letting her power spill into him with abandon. They were both glowing when they finally parted.

"I now pronounce you Nexus and elf, or man and wife, you may kiss each other."

Xander bent her back over his arm and their kiss and the explosion of joy that Abby let loose had everyone cheering.

When he set her on her feet, they walked to the open tent set aside for the time between noon and sunset and they took their places at the head table. Abby smiled and looked at her new husband, "I am really glad we did the whole legal and blood bond before the ceremony. I really didn't want to put our nuptials up to a challenge."

The gnomes were on high-service alert and soon, they were both treated to a full selection of the human-safe foods from the buffet.

"Wow, this is quite the spread." Abby smiled.

"Far more of a variety than I had anticipated. This is great." Xander fed her from his plate and she did the same from hers. It was incredibly cute and also could double as foreplay if they didn't have to engage in an elf ritual at sunset.

Musicians started up and a few folks began to dance. Xander quickly wiped his hands on the napkin and led her to the dance floor. "Dance with me, Mrs. Desmith."

Abby blinked in surprise. That was her name now. "Of course."

As they cruised around the dance floor, she noticed Xander's parents, Max and Gregori, Laura and Verne, Seesee and Miklos, as well as dozens of others who had touched their lives since Abby had been outed as the Nexus.

Everyone was here to share the joy, to have fun and to witness a historic moment. Abby was the first female-married Nexus in history. The little fact that Xander's ancestress, Terranor, was not only a female Nexus, but also one who had married and had a bunch of children and was, in fact cruising around the dance floor with her husband, Strykr, didn't mean much to people who didn't know their Nexus history.

Abby was not the first, nor would she be the last of their kind. Waltzing around the floor was soothing and as Xander leaned in to whisper, his hair slid along her cheek. "What has put that smile on your face?"

She looked up into his gleaming eyes. "I am thinking about my past and our future." She stroked his cheek and the tingle that ran through her had nothing to do with her own energy and everything to do with his.

Chapter Six

As they danced to music that blended in strange and usual styles, pictures were taken, sketches were frantically drawn for later portraits and everyone was trying to get in on this piece of magical history.

Strykr cut in and passed Terranor to her grandson. "How are you enjoying your wedding, Nexus?"

"Abby. And it is wonderful. Nothing has gone really, really wrong and that, as you know, is a miracle with my creatures around." She smiled at the handsome elf that reminded her of Xander in so many ways.

He grinned, "Yes. A miracle or a lot of behind-the-scenes action."

Abby blinked, there was something going on that she wasn't seeing and for once, she was relieved. "What I don't know won't freak me out."

He laughed. "Good attitude. Have you decided on a honeymoon spot? I hear it is traditional

among your people.”

She laughed out loud as he spun her in a turn. “I think we will just crank up the wards on Oak Point Way and enjoy being as normal as we can be.”

“That seems a tad boring for you.”

“Sometimes the day to day has the most appeal. How has your wife been keeping?”

“Oh, she is busy with the project you have gotten her into and her sudden urge to keep tabs on all of our grandchildren.” His smile was soft as he thought of Terranor, and Abby smiled when he sought sight of his wife across the dance floor.

“I hope we are still that in love after five years, let alone hundreds.” Abby had no idea how long her lifespan was, but she was planning to spend every waking moment with Xander that she could. She would make her memories last for eternity, no matter how much time they had.

“You will be. Your souls have been floating in search of each other for eons. Now that they have connected, they will not let go. It was the same for Terranor and me.” His low tones reached only her ears.

“Excuse me, may I cut in?” One of the seven goblin kings was there, offering his multiple arms for her as partner.

Strykr nodded, kissed Abby’s cheek and let the king steer her around the dance floor. It was the start of a trend that had Abby’s bottom pinched,

her toes stepped on and a close encounter with troll drool that she could have done without.

Abby almost collapsed with relief when Laura and Seesee claimed her for the formal pictures that were to be taken outside the front of the hotel.

Xander took her by the arm and they led the procession of family, friends and acquaintances who were going to join them in the Nexus wedding album.

A solemn column of robed figures met them in the front garden. As they approached, Abby noticed a lightening of Xander's soul. "Who are they?"

"The seers. My great, great grandmother and cousins who have powerful connections to the future and past."

"Like Celia." Abby waved to the young seer and she waved back before one of her elders shook their heads in an exasperated manner.

"Just like Celia. Come, you need to meet Gwynnar." He steered them toward the seers and the group turned as one.

Abby winced inwardly. No, that wasn't creepy at all.

An aged elf stepped forward and held out her hands for a greeting, not to Xander but to Abby. "Abby, I have dreamed of you since I was a very little girl."

Abby smiled as she recognized the resemblance

to a child she once knew. "You are related to Elspeth." The contact between them caused a spark and the seer closed her eyes.

"Her granddaughter. It is good to meet you finally. Xander was never quite sure of meeting and falling in love with a Nexus, but you proved his doubts groundless."

Abby elbowed Xander in the ribs, "Doubts?"

"Only about meeting you, never after that. Nanna Gwynhar, you are giving me a bad reputation on my wedding day."

"Sorry, Xander." She winked one bright blue eye.

The photographer cleared his throat. "We are losing the light. We need to take these pictures."

That was that. They lined up in neat rows with Xander and Abby front and centre. Abby smiled, held Xander's hands and they got through his entire family—with Terranor and Strykr in the final row—his parents, the seers and his siblings.

"Tara and Strykr, come back here. I want one with just you two in it." Abby was firm and Xander's grin agreed with her.

Tara and Strykr got their photo and then Terranor and Annabeth stood together in a moment that had never before been captured on film. Two Nexuses together for the first time in history.

The men joined them and more pictures were

snapped, then it was time for the Oak Point Guard photos.

The guard did one picture standing formally. One with them scowling into the lens and another with all the couples in clinches. The final photo included all of Abby's creatures standing with their arms crossed and glaring into the camera.

After that, there was a set of photos with Xander, Abby and her creatures and then all hell broke loose on film as Abby and her beasts took centre stage.

A halo of pixies, fence of gnomes and a belt made of a dragon with the gargoyles holding the edge of her dress would be Abby's second favourite. Her favourite was her sitting holding Buffy, Bitsy and Alphie on her lap. The new family and proof that her creatures would have a life without her.

Once she was sitting, creatures swarmed her and she kissed and hugged them all while the shutter clicked frantically.

Laughing, Abby looked up to see Xander staring at her with a gentle expression on his face. "It's time for the final ritual. My life to yours."

The photographer continued clicking madly as Abby rose to kiss her husband, their last moment as two separate beings.

The crowd of creatures ebbed and flowed around them as they returned to the altar, this time

saplings framed it and were tied into a bough to give them shelter.

The gathering of witnesses sat silently, the levity of the earlier ceremony forgotten. This was the one that would be binding for eternity.

Abby and Xander entered a circle of elven elders. The circle closed behind them and even Abby's creatures had to wait outside.

Strykr was in the circle but was not conducting the ceremony. That duty fell to an elf named Raffin. A love talker with a human fiancé of his own.

"We are gathered here today to join Alexander Desmith and Annabeth Desmith in the bonds of joined life.

"This is a serious matter, not to be entered into lightly. To combine one's life means that you will share the joys, the sorrows, the pain and the eventual death of your partner. Some live for centuries, some for years, some for months, but when one dies, they die together.

"We are here to confirm not that you are willing to live together, but that you are willing to die together."

The elves in the outer circle began to charge up.

"You can change your mind and live lives together and yet separate, without the binding. Do you wish to leave?"

Abby looked to Xander. "No."

He smiled. "No. We will stay."

"Excellent. Seal the circle."

The static coming from the elves jumped in frequency and became a steady hum.

"Xander, take Abby's right hand in your left. Abby place your hand in mine. Xander take my hand as well."

They formed a triangle and waited. They didn't need to wait long. A shock of power ran from the circle and through Raffin. The shock of power didn't hurt, but it burned along her nerves in a very intimate manner.

Xander and Abby now hummed at the same frequency and Raffin presented them with a rose. "Grip it tightly and then pass it to your spouse four times."

Abby let the thorns pierce her skin and she handed the rose to Xander. His blood stained the stem in return and she repeated it. The pain radiated up her hand, but she handed the rose back to Xander. When his hand closed over it, her eyes widened as the pain came through to her. She could feel what he felt. She continued her turn and his wince confirmed that he was feeling what she was.

When the stem was covered with their blood, Raffin held out a box and Xander placed the rose in it, closing the lid.

Abby reached out to touch the lid and she

sealed the box.

“Within is the instrument of your joining, but you are now linked mind to mind, body to body and after you consummate your union, soul to soul. You share power and weakness, pain and pleasure. Life and death.”

At his last words, the elves let out a shout and a ball of power fired into the sky. It was time to start the party.

Chapter Seven

The box with the bloody rose came with them, a reminder of their choice to link and the pain they endured to make it happen. The evening party was set up with a vast array of food and drink, and a dance floor of enormous proportions gleamed invitingly.

Abby and Xander entrusted their rose to Laura who was taking a moment to get off her feet and rub her pregnant belly. Verne was sitting next to her and he began a foot rub as soon as she was distracted by watching the box and a little less concerned about propriety.

Seesee was dancing slowly with Miklos and a sleepy Gaia. Buffy and Bitsy took to the dance floor while Echo watched Alphie for them.

All around them, creatures paired up and began to dance as Hellebore sang a slow torch song.

* * * *

Ruffles danced with Skint who had worn tights for the occasion. "What do we do now that she is taken care of?"

Skint gave it some thought. "We do what she always wanted. We live our lives and come home for the holidays."

Ruffles smiled. "I have always wanted to see Asia."

He spun her into a twirl. "Funny you should mention it. So have I."

* * * *

Harbinger was loitering near the buffet when a small sprite walked up to him. "You are one of the Nexus's creatures, aren't you?"

He bowed low, his dress leathers studded in an attractive pattern. "I am. Harbinger, at your service."

The pale green woman giggled. She was only four inches taller than he was. "I have always wanted to be with a being of pure magic."

"Then I fit the bill. What is your name?" Harby couldn't believe it. He might get lucky.

"Minxi. Minxi Larish. Would you care to dance?"

He swallowed and offered his arm. Together, they stepped onto the dance floor and began a slow turn that had them centre stage where the

entire gathering could see them.

Harby decided in that moment that he liked weddings.

* * * *

Splint and Mitsy sat back and watched the dancers. He was hampered by the built-in cast that the Nexus had given him and she by her gloves.

Mitsy gave him a serious look. "Wanna make out?"

He didn't need to be asked twice.

* * * *

Angel and Firefly were enjoying the attentions of a flock of pixies and each moment caused ripples of pleasurable torture that they didn't want to stop. They really liked weddings.

* * * *

"The ceremonies were beautiful." Seesee rocked comfortably in Miklos's arms, Gaia nodding off to sleep between them.

"They were. Would you ever want to join your life to someone like that?" His words were casual, but it was a forced casual.

"Maybe, but I think I would have to wait until

my powers have left me. Only a few more years." She smiled and used a strand of her hair to caress his cheek.

"Being powerless will be an adjustment for you, won't it?" His tone was soft and understanding.

"It will. I have had them for most of my life. I don't want my niece to take them in the same blinding rush that I had. But life without them isn't something I can even think of now. I don't even know if I will be allowed to stay in the Oak Point Guard without them." She smiled and gave him a light kiss as a counterpoint to her words.

He cleared his throat. "Would you consider becoming vampire?"

She grinned. "I will consider it when the time comes. Who knows if you will even want me when I have a few more wrinkles and Gaia is growing up?"

Miklos's hands clenched on her waist. "I believe I will want you forever. I am in love with you, Seesee. You, not the gorgon, not your hair, not the guard. You."

Tears started to seep from her eyes. "I am very glad to hear you say that, because I don't know what I would do if you didn't." She leaned up to kiss him as they swayed to the music.

* * * *

Gwynhar looked to her grandchildren all around her and smiled at her own mother and grandmother. They were all together at the same table and sharing a moment. Only Terranor still had her spouse, the others had never engaged in the binding ceremony.

Gwynhar had never thought it would be necessary to bind herself to her full-blood elf husband. He was designed to outlive her, but the moment that their first child had been born, she knew that he would not see Xander born.

A hunting accident had proven her right.

She smiled as she watched Abby looking up at Xander as they twirled around the dance floor. There was love there. Love and acceptance of flaws.

From the moment that she had first seen a female Nexus in the modern age, she had planned for this moment and now it was here. Abby had seemed like a wild card when she had first appeared in the visions and now Gwynhar knew why. Only a woman who followed what she thought was right, regardless of social convention, could make the changes that were sorely needed to bring magic into the modern age.

* * * *

Abby grinned as Xander dipped and twirled her

around the dance floor. Months of practice were paying off. "Did you enjoy the wedding?" she asked him as they spun past Raven and Eyleneo.

"It had its moments, but having you in my arms, my mind and my heart is all that I have ever needed from our coming together."

He dipped and righted her, then moved them a safe distance from two jitterbugging vampires.

Max and Gregori were engaged in some swing moves that left the watchers marvelling at how well she could move in a corset.

"You don't mind that your family isn't here for this?" Xander carefully avoided the whirling dancers.

"No. Mom is just happy that I have found someone she can ogle at will." It was true, her mom just wanted to come over and relax in the garden occasionally.

He sighed. "Promise that you will continue to defend my honour."

She patted his backside. "As if it was my own."

Chapter Eight

During the speeches was the perfect time to strike. Everyone was so emotionally caught up in the drama that they would never notice a narrow box going missing.

Ravinch moved between the tables, collecting dishes and putting them into his container. When he reached for the box with the bonding rose, he did so casually. The mermaid murmured a quiet thanks as he withdrew her small plate as well.

He stayed calm as he moved through the crowd and stopped to pick up more plates on the way. When he moved toward the kitchen, everything seemed calm. He slipped behind a shrub and discarded the dishes, retrieving the box and slipping it into his coat.

It had taken weeks to get him onto the serving team, but the pureblood coalition had done what was necessary to get him here. The blood on the rose could give them control over the Nexus and her new husband. This was an opportunity that

could not be missed.

There were a few wandering guests, but he passed them with no one raising an alarm. A couple who was making out near the door to the hotel didn't even stop when he passed within inches. The woman appeared to be of the mer persuasion. Her blue hair crackled and rippled with energy.

As soon as his hand touched the door to the hotel, a bolt of energy struck him in the spine, paralyzing him.

"Oh dear. You don't think that the Oak Point Guard wasn't expecting something like this, do you?" The woman whispered the words into his ear, her blue hair falling over his shoulder. He blinked frantically and tried to speak.

The man she had been with spoke, his deep tones almost subsonic. "Don't even think about it. We gave you every chance to return the rose, now you will be held until tomorrow when the guilds will deal with your attempts to sabotage the Nexus."

He couldn't say a word as the male with the solid black eyes lifted him off his feet. Shark shifter, he had never seen one this far from the ocean before. The man was a pureblood and should have been on their side.

He was hauled unceremoniously into the hotel and the woman licked her palm before pressing it

to the wall. Four men glared at him as he started to enter the room.

“Not so fast. The rose.” The woman slipped her hand into his coat and removed the box, pausing to verify it before nodding. She jerked her head. “In you go. Join the others who were doing it for the cause.”

He was shoved into the room and before he could whirl to cast a spell, it was closed with no trace that a wall had ever been there.

“Where are we?”

One of the others growled. “Pocket dimension. She designed it just for this.”

Ravinch blinked, “Who was she?”

“Water magus. I got nailed with a spit ball.”

* * * *

Haily walked arm in arm with Loki back to the party. “Do you think that there will be other attempts?”

“Probably, but that is why we are here. Both powerful enough to earn an invitation and yet not involved in the festivities.” He smiled and his shark teeth were exposed. “I am enjoying myself.”

She chuckled and pressed herself against his side. “Sweet talker. You take me to all the nicest places.”

“From a Nexus wedding to the depths of the

ocean, where ever I go, I want you with me."

She snorted. "You are *so* getting lucky tonight if you keep that up."

He laughed. "Keeping it up is important to the process of getting lucky."

After they handed the rose back to the dragon for placement as bait in another portion of the party, they returned to their post. Making out for hours at a time would have taken its toll on a lesser couple, but Haily and Loki were up to the challenge.

* * * *

Hellebore smiled and swung her rippling red hair over one shoulder. "Now for the moment we have all been waiting for, the throwing of the garter and the tossing of the bouquet."

A chair was brought for Abby and she sat carefully on the edge so that Xander could get at the garter. "Make sure all that you remove is the garter. This customized underwear is coming home with me."

She laughed at the light in his eyes as his voice proved his attention was firmly on her. "You mean with me. I doubt you can get out of it without help." His hands slid under her gown and up her calves.

"What if I ask you nicely?"

"You would have to ask me very nicely indeed." He stroked the backs of her knees as he passed them.

"I will work on the appropriate appeal."

His fingers hooked the garter on her thigh and started to drag it down over the silk of her stockings. He drew it off with a flourish and stood to face the men who were milling with a churning intensity. He turned his back to them and fired the garter back into the crowd.

Fistfights broke out as men tackled each other for the magic that had been worn by the Nexus herself.

Abby winced as a particularly spiked goblin jumped into the fray.

Seesee brought her the bouquet assembled from flowers in the Nexus's garden that very morning for just this moment. The ladies hissed in sympathy at the fight until finally a troll pumped his fist into the air and cried out his triumph. Some of the lady trolls started to bat their eyes at him and flirt.

Hellebore took charge again. "Gentlemen, can you make way? The ladies need their turn and then the bride and groom will be off for their honeymoon."

The women crushed into a milling throng, their eyes on the bouquet as if it was a lodestone. Where it went, their focus went.

Abby turned her back to the women, mentally told her creatures to leave it alone and threw it over her shoulder. She whirled to watch before it had reached the peak of its arc. Magic crackled and twisted as women tried to snare it with spells, but the flowers resisted magic.

As the beribboned bouquet fell to into the centre of the crowd, an upward surge of the outward women made the men's fistfight look civilised.

"Oh wow. That is just...does she have spikes?"

Seesee was next to her and nodding. "And that spider goblin is using her silk to try and...oops, didn't quite hit it. Getting that troll unstuck will be a problem."

"We should have just had a fistfight like at a werewolf wedding. It would have been simpler and there would have been healers standing by." Abby had the sudden craving for popcorn as a dress was torn and a hand was stomped.

Xander wrapped his arm around her waist and nodded to Seesee. "We are leaving here, Mrs. Desmith, before your bloodlust gets any more intense."

"Fine, Mr. Desmith. Whisk me away." She leaned into his arms and turned her face up for his kiss.

As they finished their smooch, Seesee smacked the rose box into her hand. "Take this with you. I will watch the acorn until you get back."

Abby didn't even have time to respond. Xander opened a portal and they were gone.

* * * *

With the bride and groom gone, the party got into full swing. A young magus was eventually declared the owner and healers wandered around, fixing the residue of the bouquet melee.

The photographer had gotten some amazing pictures, including the triumphant woman standing on her defeated foes with the flowers raised over her head.

Gaia was sleeping in a puppy pile with her cousins and some of the other children. Troll matrons had been assigned to watch over them and they were taking their responsibility seriously, not letting anyone but recognized parents near them.

Seesee rubbed her neck and sought out Miklos. He was over with Gregori and Max, probably discussing vampire guild business.

Laura and Verne were leaning against each other, their budding offspring protected by Verne's hand.

With nothing else to do, Seesee wandered over to the buffet. Terric the Black came up next to her.

He raised his glass to her. "It was quite the event, this Nexus wedding."

"It was. Where is your phoenix?" They were both members of the creatures guild, so she was familiar with his dating history.

"She is at her families' table. We have been engaging in a slow courtship." He looked a little awkward. "Things are more complicated in the modern age."

"You mean her desire to be more than a pet at your beck and call?"

His lips twisted. "Yes. That."

She laughed and helped herself to some punch. She sipped cautiously before confirming that it was suitable for humanoid digestion.

"Why are you talking to me?"

He raised an eyebrow. "We are fellow creatures, are we not?"

"We are."

"I am making a bid for head of the mythological creatures council."

She grinned and nodded. "I will back you, as will my sisters. Vokal has had his run and aside from his bullheadedness, he hasn't brought much to the table."

He grinned. "I was not talking about me. I am going to put a bid in for you to be head of the creatures council."

"What?"

"You are intelligent, exceedingly magical and you know more than anyone that magic in the

world is a fleeting thing. I think in the few years that you have before you turn over your status, you could really make a difference.” He bowed and smiled, showing sharp, pointed teeth. “The modern world needs people who understand it to help us blend in as best we can.”

She shook her head. “I don’t understand. What do you mean?”

“When I woke, do you know how long it took for me to figure out modern banking? How to get a mortgage? Dealing with contractors? In times past, I could swing down and pick up what I needed, but now there are cameras everywhere and when we do show up on film, the areas are swamped with curiosity seekers.” He shrugged. “I am not allowed to kill them anymore...so what do I do? These are questions the newly awakened need to know and with more magic stirring in the world than ever before, we need someone who can take us forward.”

“But, Gaia, Miklos...”

“Miklos understands. I have spoken to him already. He is also ready to help you transition back into a magical creature if you wish to when the time comes.” Terric patted her on the shoulder. “Think about it, but I will submit your name regardless.”

After he dropped that bomb, he just walked away.

Seesee walked to Miklos and he put his arm around her. When Max and Gregori returned to the dance floor, he whispered, "Whatever you decide, I am there for you. Human, creature, vampire or what have you. I love you Seesee Montrose and I always will."

With tears pricking her eyes, she smiled and shook out her dark rainbow skirts. "Let's dance and leave decisions until they have to be made."

Chapter Nine

“Where are we?” The furnishings and the bright light streaming in from every angle amazed Abby.

“A special place where no one will be able to interrupt. The guards will take care of your creatures and we can have a few days to ourselves.” Xander was working at the ties of her gown and as it loosened and slid to the floor, she smiled at his expression.

“I have the feeling that I know this place.” She sauntered up to him and ran her hands over his sash, loosening the tie until it unravelled.

His eyes closed when she slid her hands under his tunic and across the muscles of his abdomen.

She stripped off the tunic and left him in his trousers and boots, backing away to the bed.

“It seems that I do need some help with this underwear. Would you please be so kind as to render assistance, my dearest husband?”

To say that he lunged forward was a slight

exaggeration, but only slight. When he released her from her corset and the wisp of silk she was wearing, they tumbled to the bed joining their bodies as their senses had been joined. His clothes disappeared in a shiver of magic and then it was playtime.

The novelty of feeling each caress she made from both the giving and receiving side was enthralling. They spent hours touching, stroking and sliding along each other's bodies. Abby and Xander froze the moment that their bodies reached climax and their souls blended completely.

Laughter woke them at what seemed to be days after they arrived. A table was set for two on one side of the large room and Abby was sure that it hadn't been there before. "Xander, who is our host?"

"Hailey the archive. We are in a section of the archive dimension seldom seen." Xander stretched and eyed the food that was appearing on the table with a steady pace until everything was just so.

Abby started to laugh as she sat up and groaned instead. "I don't know if that was you or the corset, but I am really stiff."

He helped her to her feet and they crossed to the table.

Abby squealed happily. "Bacon!" She lunged and popped a piece into her mouth before the

texture got to her. "Turkey bacon. The gnomes got to her."

Xander laughed and the novelty of being on a nude and laughing man distracted her for a moment. "Laugh while you can." She ran her fingers across a few interesting points of sensation on her own body and watched his mouth tighten with sensual tension.

"Ha." She leaned forward and snagged some more turkey bacon. "Better than nothing."

She leaned back and dragged some of her favourite treat along his lower lip. "Want some?"

"That is a loaded question. Eat and let's go back to bed. I think I owe you a backrub."

She thought about it. "I don't think so."

He nodded sagely, "I am sure of it. Eat up."

Not one to disobey when it came to keeping herself stable, she dove into the selection of food and nagged Xander into eating his share.

By the time they were back under the magically replaced sheets, Abby had to agree, Xander did owe her a backrub, often and frequently.

The next time she woke, they were not alone in the bedroom. "Hello, Abby. Don't get up."

Hailey in all of her long-boned glory was sitting on the chair next to the bed.

"Hailey, how nice to see you again." Abby was genuinely happy to see the woman again. Well,

she thought it was a woman, with Hailey, one never knew. Her name had been chosen for modern convenience and was not the one she had been born with.

"I have come to give you some information on the vows you just sealed."

"The life bonding? I have heard it isn't done often."

"There is a reason for that. They stress death in the ritual, but if you check the archives—and I did—there are only two cases of a life-bonded couple dying. Both of those cases ended their lives at the same time by jumping into a volcano."

Abby sat straight up, clutching the sheet to her breast. "What?"

Hailey held up a tube filled with blue oil and clear water. She tilted it on its side and shifted it to the right. "The oil is the life force of both of you. If one partner, the right one, loses his life," she rocked the cylinder, "the life force tilts back to the living partner to keep them alive. Life is a constantly replenishing source, so if there is no reason for the living partner to be dead, they won't die."

"Who knows about this?"

Hailey scratched her head. "I don't know. No one has ever bothered to come looking for the information. So me and now you."

"Can I tell Xander?"

"You could, but I think he will be able to hear it in your thoughts." She smiled.

"Why isn't he waking up?"

"Because you are the one who is asleep. I promised to stay away from your rooms. I never said I wouldn't invade your resting dreams."

"Will I remember this when I wake up?"

"Yes. And I would ask you to come visit now and then. I find the chronicles of your activities and those of the rest of your circle to be fascinating, but sometimes I have questions."

Hailey's grin was infectious.

Abby sighed. "Trust me, I am in some of those activities and I wonder what the heck happened, but I will make an effort to come for a visit, whenever I am invited. If you wish it, I can even bring a friend along so you can interview them personally."

"It's a deal. I expect to see you in the middle of your second trimester. I will send a signal."

Abby's shock ran through her and woke her up. She sat up and shouted. "Trimester?"

* * * *

Across the archive, Hailey laughed. Abby was good for this world, this time and this place and Xander was good for her.

Hailey thought back to all the lines she had

coaxed together to create more Nexuses. Only one at a time ever emerged, but in Abby and Xander, a true line of power could be crafted. If they were as good at parenting as they were at dealing with magic users, their eight offspring would be happy and healthy, not to mention powerful.

Hailey made her notes on the family trees that had led to this moment and smiled as she looked up and up and up to the origin of the line of power that ended in Abby.

The dragon blood carried in the new Nexus was a mere whisper of what it had been over three thousand years ago when Hailey watched her sister run off to marry a hill tribesman. Hailey had taken on the position of eternal archive immediately after that, watching her sister's love and loss and then the bloom of children who wore her sister's face.

Power had been their fixation and had been their destiny. Hailey had simply watched until she used her studies to prove the dwindling of magic in the world. At that point, she knew she had to act.

Years of tweaking bloodlines, arranging marriages and encouraging of power and still only one Nexus existed at a time.

Hailey smiled as she admired the names she had just written. Annabeth Hanover and Xander Desmith. One a Nexus, one carrying the bloodline

and both extremely powerful and controlled.

When they had children, it was going to be a very interesting century.

These last few years had already been a hoot.

Author's Note

Whew. Did it. Abby and Xander got their happily ever after and I included almost every character that has played a part in the three novels and five novellas. I think I sprained something.

There are other stories to be told in this universe, but they will have to be taken one on one. Writing Abby and all her creatures is something of a strain. That's a lot of creatures.

But, be assured, Terric and his phoenix will make their courtship public. Perhaps around the holidays 2011.

Thanks for reading!

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About the Author

Viola Grace was born in Manitoba, Canada where she still resides today. She really likes it there. She has no pets and can barely keep sea monkeys alive for a reasonable amount of time. Her line of day job tends to be analytical which leaves her mind hopping to weave stories. No co-worker is safe from her character analysis. In keeping with busy hands are happy hands, her hobbies have included cross-stitch, needlepoint, quilting, costuming, cake decorating, baking, cooking, metal work, beading, sculpting, painting, doll making, henna tattoos, chain mail, and a few others that have been forgotten. It is quite often that these hobbies make their way into her tales.

Viola's fetishes include boots and corsetry, and her greatest weakness is her uncontrollable blush. Her writing actively pursues the Happily Ever After that so rarely occurs in nature. It is an admirable thing and something that we should all strive for. To find one that we truly like, as well as love.